

Structuralism

1) a movement, method, first developed in anthropology and then xferred to the other human sciences which draws on structural linguistics (the work of Saussure).

Best known proponent, Claude Levi-Strauss. Essentially developed to study "static" cultures (therefore questionable how it can be applied to changing ones).

2) it relies on an analysis of relationships which are seen as significant patterns. (often patterns of binary opposition and substitution.) These are found through looking for patterns of repetition and difference. [explain, 19th c. discovery of classification by difference, not similarity]

example: oedipal conflict narrative. (a narrative structure)

basic structure: father and son in conflict over woman (3 term relationship)

woman has volition, can help one or other

father has initial power [NB these terms are symbolic]

must be displaced. a power struggle, but framed within gender and sexuality.

Basic Western Love Myth: Tristan and Isolde (tragic version)

Comic oedipal version. [see my analysis of Shampoo]

The basic question: once we see the repetition of the basic pattern over time and so many different examples in different times and places, we have to acknowledge that it is significant. Why is it there?

Structuralism was useful in cultural analysis because it went beyond, provided a position for critiqueing:

Empiricism and positivism

empiricism: the world can be adequately known through examination of its tangible phenomenae

positivism: the tools and methods of investigating the hard sciences are applicable to social phenomenae;

anti-historical

Historicism; that history tells its own truth which is revealed in the evidence (as against contemporary notion that history is a constructed discourse about the past)

Rhetorical, Aristotelean analysis (another ahistorical analysis; mechanistic, of fixed categories (eg, tragedy)

Organic analysis: unity of form and content, very powerful when combined with historical analysis; but, has limits in cultural analysis when it does not offer a way of looking at systematic absence (esp. oppression), can be used to simply accept what already is, rather than look for potential for change. [NB structuralism has this same problem]

Structural analysis is also very compatible with Formalism, esp. as developed by Russian Formalists. Esp. in close analysis of formal features.

The appeal of structuralism. It tries to develop models which could then be used to analyze a relationship--it lends itself well to comparative analysis. In terms of film, it applies well to the patterns of repetition that were being developed in authorship criticism.

It also fits well with ideas of narrative, esp. well in terms of formulaic fictions, eg. mainstream H'wood film.

It has been frequently used as an approach which combines genre and social analysis (eg Will Wright's Sixguns and Society; which see the critique of by Janey Place in JC); the problem with it is that it often remains static, and that it often refuses history.

Opens up the possibility of a symptomatic reading: something which is found to be significant in cultural objects being investigated, can itself be taken as evidence of a more profound pattern within the culture as a whole. (eg absence or marginalization of certain groups is itself revealing--Blacks appear only as servants, and only for a brief moment; women insignificant in (most examples of) war, gangster, western, male action film--there only to mark something about the hero, or to be raped or murdered to further the plot. Eg. 2nd Rambo film. NB. not in all cases, we are talking about dominant patterns, not absolute rules.

The dissatisfaction that most people feel with a pure structuralism (and why it hardly exists as such, at least in film studies) is that it seems finally, to assign agency (why things happen, how they might change) to the structure. (In this it is much like Jungian criticism, archetypal analysis.) In this sense its ideas tend to be taken over for diagnostic or symptomatic purposes rather than ends in themselves.

Some examples, developing structuralism in a Marxist/feminist criticism:

Charles Eckert, "Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's Marked Woman" in M&M2

Charles Eckert, "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller" in JC: HP&CC.

Chuck Kleinhans, "Shampoo: Oedipal Symmetries and Heterosexual Knots" JC

Julia Lesage, "Celine and Julie Go Boating:" JC 24/25

The Cahiers analysis of Morocco

from CdC 225 (Nov-Dec 1970) 5-13

begins with quote from Georges Bataille which takes a dim view of H'wood:

"it seems impossible...to discover anywhere else in the world women so unnatural, gross, impossible." Love, the philosophy of the boudoir, is demeaned.

1. This analysis is a continuation of the YML piece
there CdC demonstrated that the ideological \neg non \neg --what is uttered in itself--is subverted by the stress effects of the Fordian writing.
[i.e. Ford's style/form changes the ideological content]
2. YML is the ethical-political face of the capitalist and theological face of H'wood.
Morocco is its erotic face. H'wood is the major site of the production of the erotic myths of bourgeois society.
(erotic is equated with fetishist, w/o explanation)
3. From Kristeva, the change in the 14th c. from epic to novelesque (romance).
woman is offered up as a "pseudo-center"; not as woman in her social reality but as figure which the man (author/hero) then relates to; she exists so he can act.
[NB this is an analysis of the text itself, not of the reception of the text; but that will be significantly changed in Mulvey's analysis which also draws on Berger's Ways of Seeing (implicitly, at least) because she will also discuss reception by the viewer-subject] this is also not really a very good analysis of changing nature of narrative placement of women at this time; cannot be sustained as an analysis in other national literatures very well. This section is the foundation for all later Lacanian influenced ideas on the position of women represented in the narrative.
4. NB. "This reciprocal absorption of the One and the Other (the Author and the Woman) within an effacement of sexual difference accounts for (and implies) the fact that the Masquerade, Virile Display and Inversion are the erotic paradigms of Morocco." Now, actually, all of this is also based very much on the knowledge of CdC that Sternberg was himself sexually ambiguous (bisexual, or multisexual). In many ways they cannot really accept this and their subsequent discussion (and that of many of the followers of this line of thought) are fundamentally premised on rigid sex/gender differentiation. They do not like ambiguity.
5. From Lacan: "in order to be the phallus (the signifier of the desire of the Other) {that is in order to function within the image/narration as the indicator of the woman's desire}, a woman will reject part of femininity, her attributes in the masquerade." [Is this really perfectly clear? No, not really, they borrow some concepts from Lacan, but its a kind of imaginative borrowing--its useful to their purposes, they take it over very casually] See Fn to Montrelay: in order to produce this, a woman takes on masquerade (esp as clothing) to say nothing.
6. In YML the diegetic process called for a chronological reading. In Morocco the structures are repeated with variation. Thus a synchronic reading is justified.
7. There is a double determination--the erotic and the social.
8. Two love triangles:

La B. loves Amy Jolly who loves Brown

just as
Caesar loves Mme. C. who loves Brown

(relationship of Europeans and Moroccans).

9. Erotic relations take place within the framework of a social situation which determines the erotic relations and is determined by them. The social and the erotic form two levels, "inscriptions" in the discourse. The existing social hierarchy is "perverted" by the erotic.

10. Social stratification

- a. the haute bourgeoisie. La B.
- b. the colonial bourgeoisie. La B's friends, the dinner party
- c. the native bourgeoisie
- d. officers of the Legion (Capt. Caesar)
- e. owner of the cabaret
- f. lower strata of Legionnaires, Moroccan crowds, singers, dancers, prostitutes of the cabaret, camp followers.

The men are fixed in position, the women (may have) some fluidity. Mme Caesar dresses "down" as a Moroccan woman. Amy Jolly is fallen in class at the start, is promoted in the film and then chooses to fall again [but for a higher goal, true love, true desire].

The object of desire is of inferior status to the desiring subject. [NB w/in the diegesis]

11. The film shows a "topographical inscription": High/Low in the town and the cabaret; and horizontal between the town and the desert. Desiring subjects find their object in the depths. The desert is the pure signifier of desire.

sets of opposition

Europeans	Moroccans
Old World	New World (Brown)
status	d'classe
grids	uniform white expanse

12. Mythological determinations. The historical role of the star in the H'wood system. A star has a relatively restricted number of possible types. The extrafilmic and filmic come together in indicating a role. Importance of her first appearance; she has had wealth and erotic success, but this "past capital" has been squandered.

13. Von Sternberg's inscription. First LaB approx. = Sternberg. At first the protector and suitor of Deitrich, then the man who will not be taken over by a woman and who then devalues her. Second, theme of abandonment. Caesar is abandoned by his wife. La B is abandoned by Amy Jolly. La B lowers himself in the whole process [wouldn't this be better understood as masochism?] Note the transgressive effect--a transgression of the social codes through public admission of distress, defeat, irremedial loss.

14. [The analysis ignores the kiss AJ gives the woman in the cabaret. Is this a show for Brown? Yes, but it can also be taken in other ways; it too is a transgression of the social codes, through public admission of erotic interest in other women.]

15. The relation of femininity to virility is inverted from the phallocentric fantasy. Here Brown is inferior in social position and is AJ's object of desire. The women move from the Old World to the New, to the American. La B is an inverted virility--shows precious behavior. Similarly, Lo Tinto, the cafe owner, is mixed race, shows signs of femininity, gayness.

16. The critique of the fetishism of value. In H'wood fetishism moves from commodity to characters, in an erotic fiction.

17. "All values in Morocco are fetishes: money, jewels, clothes, woman (star)." These are extra-cinematic. Sternberg's use of their fetishist nature does not exhaust their value, but accentuates it. "The Sternbergian fetish, therefore, does not inscribe itself into the fiction solely as a signifier of castration--it is not solely involved in the trajectories of the erotic (as their cause)." [There is an acknowledgement here that the fetish object does not exist only as erotic, but also as social, in meaning; both are needed; in fact, one potentiates the other.]

18. [But much of the specific argument made here by CdC is based on Lacan's essay "The Signification of the Phallus," which is not a neutral analysis, e.g. the acceptance of the concept of castration as unproblematic. Why Lacan, and what did he say? Lacan introduces a version of Freudian psychoanalysis into French thought which had mostly rejected or resisted

psychoanalysis. He makes a number of very significant changes in Freud, particularly in locating the basis of consciousness not in a series of stages of development in childhood, but in the "mirror phase" and the acquisition of language. He takes over concepts of structural linguistics; his work, then, is in many ways complementary with that of Althusser on ideology.]

19. [The key question as it develops in terms of the transfer and development of ideas is how psychoanalysis is used, and its own status. In general, there is a problematic situation here. Freudian thought comes very early to the US, and very late to England and France. There is a rather massive extension, elaboration, and critique of Freudian thought, particularly in its implications for social action in the U.S. The early feminist movement in the US takes a very negative and skeptical view of Freudian analysis and its intellectual model; but the French, and in turn the British, find it very appealing and tend to be uncritical of the whole project. There ensues a very complicated, and often antagonistic use of psychoanalysis in critical discussion, particularly in feminist film thought. The important thing in terms of theoretical development, is the status of these concepts: there is often an extreme sliding between different levels of thought. The "scientificness" of psychoanalysis is invoked to declare its truth, but there is also a frequent use of it in a merely symbolic and approximate way, and a "hiding" of the more problematic aspects of it; this is particularly so with its relation to feminism. Rather than actually rigorously thinking through the conjunction of psychoanalysis, marxism, feminism, and film, and how they can be used together, often there is a sloppy ad hoc appropriation and/or a mere citation of authority. This is rather characteristic of film theory in general; often a wholesale taking over of a different system without really examining it carefully.]

20. Deitrich's power of seduction and fascination. In the cabaret, she is elusive and untouchable (except by Brown). She is fetishized in proportion to her inaccessibility. "The moralizing inscription of the renunciation of her accessories is overdetermined by the inscription of them as fetish objects which renew the chain of desire." The film ends up within H'wood--a circular critique of the ideology of natural purity and of fetishism by natural purity. The film ends with the fetish (AJ) chasing the mirage (Brown). [In other words, the film has a critique in it, a certain kind of critique, which is limited. By casting off the cultural signs of eroticism (the jewels, the shoes), AJ seems to be renouncing the artificial for the "natural"; but this is a characteristic move of the dominant ideology, or ideology in general. What is in fact cultural is posed as natural, especially in terms of the down side of a power relationship: women, children, Blacks, etc. are seen as "natural" because they are without power. Sternberg actually cannot present something which is pure and natural as the binary opposition of the artificial, but just ends up with a confused inversion. In other words, Sternberg presents everything within the framework of the artificial and cultural; he then seems to produce a renunciation of that in the pursuit of a pure desire (natural), but cannot really do so.]

21. Brown as mirage. Two times he leaves, but leaves a trace, which motivates AJ to pursue him: the message on the mirror, her name on the table; and finally he leaves for the desert.

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